

Propulsion officer lands distinguished grad award

by Ranney Adams, Propulsion Directorate



MSgt. Mark E. Whittaker

EDWARDS AFB, CALIF. — Master Sgt. Mark E. Whittaker was welcomed home by a big billboard sign at the Air Force Research Laboratory Propulsion Directorate as he brought home Distinguished Graduate Honors and the Commandant's Award from school this summer.

The awards were announced at the Air Force's Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Academy at Maxwell AFB, Ala., during his class graduation banquet held on June 23.

Whittaker's Class 99-D consisted of 323 senior NCOs from bases around the world. It had 32 Distinguished Graduates representing the top 10 percent of the class. In addition to earning Distinguished Graduate, Whittaker was selected by his peers and instructors for one of the top three awards presented to the class, the Commandant's Award. This award is given to the student who demonstrates the highest degree of professionalism and leadership capability. The award is sponsored by the Non-Commissioned Officers Association.

The academy's commandant, Chief Master Sgt. Samuel Whalum Jr., officiated the ceremony while the Air Force Research Laboratory's Edwards Research Site's Commander, Col. Wesley R. Cox, was on hand to congratulate Whittaker. The guest speaker for the ceremony was Maj. Gen. Charles R. Holland, commander of the Air Force Special Operations Command.

Whittaker is the superintendent of the lab's Rocket Propulsion Division at Edwards and brought a wealth of missile and propulsion system experience to the six-week training academy located near Montgomery, Ala.

The purpose of the training is to provide the education for senior NCOs to become more effective leaders and managers of future Air Force efforts. Core elements of the academy's courses include organizational management, communication skills, behavioral analysis and human resource training. In addition to these leadership and management elements, academy participants are instructed on the "Profession of Arms" and international perspectives. These tools provide the graduates with an improved ability to assess and implement Air Force programs while best applying available manpower and resources.

Whittaker said, "I enjoyed meeting my peers from throughout the Air Force. The academy is a first-class facility and I was really impressed by the instructor staff. We were there to learn and they were there to teach." @